After Twenty Years

by O. Henry

After Twenty Years Summary

O. Henry's "After Twenty Years" tells the story of Jimmy and Bob, two childhood friends who made a pact to meet up after twenty years.

- At the appointed meeting time and location, a policeman walks up and asks Bob what he's doing. Bob explains that he is waiting to meet with an old friend and the officer departs.
- Later, a man claiming to be Jimmy arrives. However, the man is actually a different policeman sent to arrest Bob, who is a known criminal from Chicago. The original policeman was actually Jimmy, but he didn't have the heart to arrest his old friend.

Summary

It is approaching ten o'clock on the largely deserted avenue in New York. A policeman works his way up the street, carefully checking the locked doors of the businesses that have long since closed for the day. Suddenly, the officer of the peace encounters a man with an unlit cigar, standing in the doorway of a hardware store. Congenially, the man tells the policeman that he is waiting for a friend, whom he had agreed to meet with at that very spot, twenty years ago that day.

The waiting man strikes a match to light the cigar he is holding, and in the brief flash of illumination, the officer notes that the person before him has "a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow." On his scarf is a large diamond, indicating great wealth. The man explains that he and the friend for whom he is waiting, his "best chum" Jimmy Wells, had been raised in New York like brothers; when they had grown up, Jimmy had remained in the city, but he himself had headed West to make his fortune. Upon taking leave of each other, the two friends had agreed to meet again in exactly twenty years to the hour, "no matter what [their] conditions might be or from what distance [they] might have to come."

The waiting man pulls out a fancy watch, embellished with diamonds. The officer idly comments that he must have done "pretty well out West," and the man responds, "You bet!" and expresses the hope that Jimmy, whom he remembers as having been "a kind of plodder," has done even half as well. He is confident that his old friend will meet him that night if he is alive, no matter what his circumstances may be, because Jimmy always was "the truest, stanchest old chap in the world."

The policeman continues on his way, and the man in the doorway keeps vigil as a fine rain begins to fall. After a short time, a tall character in a long overcoat with the collar turned up to his ears approaches and inquires hesitantly, "Is that you, Bob?" The waiting man exuberantly responds in kind, "Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" and the two grasp...

(The entire section contains 643 words.)